

East Face Recreation – Existing Conditions

Introduction

The East Face project area is 47,636 acres of mixed federal, state, and private land on the east slope of the Elkhorn Mountains, west of the community of North Powder. The project area sustains a diverse mix of recreational opportunities and needs. Much of the highest-intensity recreational use occurs along the 73 road, which is a state-designated scenic byway. Multiple trailheads and campgrounds are found along this road, as is the Anthony Lakes ski area, which attracts skiers from the tri-state area on winter weekends. The Floodwater Flats recreation residence tract is adjacent to the ski area. In addition to the developed recreation opportunities at and around Anthony Lakes, East Face encompasses many other routes that lead into less-developed parts of the forest. The most popular of these routes are the 7312 road, the 43 road, and the 4315 road. While developed recreational opportunities are not found along these roads, they are frequently utilized by those individuals who wish to camp and recreate in a dispersed and primitive setting. The highest use period for these roads is during the big game hunting season in late summer and fall. Each of these areas will be analyzed in greater detail below.

73 Road/Elkhorn Scenic Byway

The densest concentration of developed recreation in the East Face Project Area is on the 73 road, specifically in the vicinity of Anthony Lakes Recreation Area. This section of the 73 road represents a portion of the state-designated Elkhorn Scenic Byway. Several campgrounds and trailheads are located around Anthony Lakes, including the northern terminus of the Elkhorn Crest National Recreation Trail. Anthony Lakes Campground and Mud Lake Campground are both situated within a dense forest dominated by subalpine fir and lodgepole pine. They are at risk from the stand-replacing wildfires characteristic of those forest types. Selective thinning to reduce fire risk while still maintaining desirable aesthetic qualities of privacy and screening within the campgrounds will benefit the recreational resource.

Anthony Lakes Recreation Area is a year-round hub for recreation at the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. In winter, the ski resort is popular with skiers and snowboarders from around the region. In addition to the lift-serviced terrain at the resort, skiers can explore several miles of established Nordic trails as well as remote backcountry areas. The whitebark pines near the summit of Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort provide a uniquely accessible opportunity for casual recreationists to learn about this rare tree species.

During the summer months, trailheads and campgrounds along the 73 road are used by dayhikers, campers, and backpackers. Several trailheads along 73 and at Anthony Lakes lead to popular high-elevation lakes and ridgetops. The 23-mile Elkhorn Crest Trail was designated as a National Recreational Trail in 1979. A short portion of the trail is within the North Fork John Day Wilderness. Anthony Lakes is an emerging destination for mountain biking, and the Nordic trail system is frequently used by bikers in the summer and fall. There are currently plans in place to expand the mountain bike trail system to include portions of the ski area as well.

7312 Road

The 7312 road is near the eastern boundary of the East Face Project Area. Like other areas within East Face, this road is heavily used by hunters and dispersed campers in the late summer and fall.

Mountain bikers ride on a closed road system off the 7312 near Gorham Butte. This network of trails has been gaining popularity in recent years. By using the 73140/73146 road as a connector, these trails have the potential to become an important component of the burgeoning Anthony Lakes mountain bike circuit. Logging, burning, and other forms of vegetation management will have short term impacts to access for this trail system. Longer-term impacts may include sections of singletrack that are obliterated during logging and segments of road beds that lose their primitive, “grown-in” feel when opened for logging.

43 Road/4315 Road

The 43 road forms the western and northern boundaries of the East Face Project Area. This road connects the Grande Ronde Valley and Ladd Canyon with the high-elevation terrain near Anthony Lakes.

Grande Ronde Lake Campground is near the junction of the 43 and 73 roads. This is a moderately busy campground and day-use area, which also features a boat dock. The campground is situated within a dense forest dominated by subalpine fir and lodgepole pine. It is at risk from the stand-replacing wildfires characteristic of those forest types. Selective thinning to reduce fire risk while still maintaining desirable aesthetic qualities of privacy and screening within the campground will benefit the recreational resource.

The quality of the 43 road diminishes north of Grande Ronde Lake. Near the eastern boundary of the Beaver Creek Roadless Area, the road quality improves again, and this section of the Project Area sees the greatest amount of traffic during the hunting season. Numerous popular dispersed camp sites are located along the 43 road and associated smaller roads.

Special Uses within East Face

A variety of recreation and non-recreation special uses occur under permit within the East Face project area. These uses include:

- The Floodwater Flats recreation residence tract is near Anthony Lakes and is approximately 35 acres in size. The tract consists of 24 cabins and associated facilities such as storage sheds, outhouses, and propane tanks. The cabins are administered by the Whitman Ranger District under 20-year special use permits and are an important component of the Anthony Lakes WUI. Vegetation management activities conducted within the last 10 years by the Forest Service have reduced the overall risk of catastrophic loss due to wildfire within the tract. The management actions included precommercial thinning to reduce stand densities and ladder fuels, cutting trees and shrubs with diameters of less than nine inches, and spacing residual trees so that crown do not touch. The actions were generally limited to within 200' of the tract. For reasons of aesthetics or desire for privacy and screening, not all residents wished to have fuel reduction activities take place adjacent to their cabins.
- The Aud & Di concessionaire operates three campgrounds (Anthony Lakes, Mud Lake, and Grande Ronde Lake) and a day-use area under a special use permit. This permit is due to expire in 2016, and a prospectus will be issued for a new concessionaire in summer or fall of 2015. There will potentially be a new concessionaire in place at Anthony Lakes before East Face project work commences. All three of these campgrounds are in high-elevation subalpine fir and lodgepole pine stands that are at significant risk from stand-replacing wildfires.
- USDA – NRCS has multiple meteorological and snow survey sites within East Face. A SNOTEL site is on a ridgetop above Wolf Creek in T. 6 S., R. 37 E., S. 2. NRCS has requested that access to this site along the 4350090 road be maintained after post-project road management. Additionally, NRCS has three snow survey courses along the 73 road at T. 7 S., R. 37 E., S. 12; T. 7 S., R. 37 E., S. 9; and T. 7 S., and T. 7 S., R. 37 E., S. 18. NRCS requires tracked-ATV and snowshoe access to the snow courses near the 1st of each month. NRCS performs annual maintenance on all facilities in the summer and fall. The timing of this maintenance can be flexible if they are advised ahead of time of road closures due to management activities. They would like to access all of the sites in mid-June through early-August. Since the snow courses and the SNOTEL site are used for long term climate monitoring, it is critical that no significant vegetation disturbance occur within 200' of the sites.

- Adventures Across Oregon (AAO) operates fly fishing services under a temporary Outfitter & Guide permit within East Face. Depending on the body of water they are attempting to fish, access may be limited due to management activities. In 2015, AAO applied for a permit to include the Grande Ronde River, which would alleviate potential access issues associated with East Face.
- Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort (ALMR) operates the ski area, lodge, rental shop, and associated facilities under a special use permit. Fuel reduction treatments within the Anthony Lakes WUI will help protect the ALMR infrastructure from significant wildfire events.
- Oregon Trail Electric Co-Op (OTEC) maintains a power transmission line in a Right-of-Way through East Face, roughly adjacent to the 73 road. OTEC is permitted to manage vegetation within their ROW to prevent interference with their transmission lines. This management will include cutting trees within the ROW and, if future requests are granted, may also include cutting trees outside the ROW that are tall enough to pose a hazard to OTEC infrastructure.
- Cascade Utilities/Reliance maintains a buried line through East Face which provides phone and internet service to residents along the 73 road.
- Several local snowmobile clubs in conjunction with Oregon State Snowmobile Association (OSSA) maintain groomed snowmobile routes through a special use permit. All groomed routes are on roads that are open to vehicular traffic during the summer. Designated routes include all or part of the following roads within East Face: 43, 43020, 4315, 4316, 4330, 7312. In the event that groomed snowmobile routes are going to be plowed for winter logging operations, recreation staff and the snowmobile clubs will amend the annual operating plans for the grooming permits to designate alternate routes.
- Some recreation activities are managed under permits which allow recreationists or operators to do certain activities under the terms of the permits. These permits include: gathering firewood, gathering forest products like mushrooms and berries, and hunting. Use of these permits can be considered 'recreational' since visitors often participate in them for primary or secondary forms of enjoyment. Although no data is available for how many permits are used in East Face, these activities can generally occur in most areas outside of riparian areas, old growth areas, tree plantations, or other specially designated locations described on the permits.